



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Batool

Councillor Porter
Councillor Whittle

Councillor Dave
Councillor March

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby

City Mayor

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19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any pecuniary or other interests they may have in the business on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

21. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following two announcements:

- (i) The Chair paid thanks to Cllr Diane Cank, who had recently stood down as Vice-Chair of the Overview Select Committee. It was anticipated that a new Vice-Chair would be appointed soon.
- (ii) The Chair thanked the City Mayor for inviting all members to the recent site visit to the new Haymarket Theatre. He commented that the visit served as a great opportunity for members to see a prime example of

how the cultural offer in Leicester was ever-expanding. The City Mayor thanked those members who had attended and confirmed that a further event would be held later in the calendar year to mark the 50th Anniversary of the theatre.

22. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

23. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair explained that following several queries and requests for additional information at the previous meeting, particularly in relation to the financial reports, a note was circulated to members with further detail. Progress regarding other actions from the last meeting was reflected on the OSC work programme.

24. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

25. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

26. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which provided an update on the status of outstanding petitions against the Council's target of providing a formal response within three months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

It was noted that there were currently four outstanding petitions, each of which were marked as 'green'.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted, and to remove those petitions marked 'Petition Complete' Ref: from the report.

27. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair reminded members that he would prefer for all questions to be provided in advance, which can help in providing more detailed responses at meetings. The Chair accepted the following questions to be asked to the City

Mayor:

1. Councillor Cassidy asked:

From the reports that I've read, the Radio 2 in the Park festival was clearly a huge success and I'd like to thank all involved in contributing to a fantastic occasion for Leicester. In terms of the rail travel problems that arose following the damage caused by storms, please can the City Mayor tell us a little about how the immediate response was handled, including the role of the City Council?

The City Mayor agreed that the event had been extremely successful and that it reflected very well on both the city and the City Council. There were very few issues of note throughout the weekend.

In respect of the disruption to rail travel following the event on Sunday, he confirmed that follow-up discussions had taken place with East Midlands Trains who had been apologetic and have acknowledged that communication could have been better, particular in terms of informing the incident management team. He was confident that lessons had been learnt by East Midlands Trains.

Eashan (co-producer representative) asked questions 2-5:

2. *I know a local football club in my community has recently been shut down without explanation. The young people of the area of the area are concerned that they won't have a space to play football. Can the city mayor please give us an update on going on as we are afraid that Rushey Mead will lose even more facilities for young people.*

In response, the City Mayor confirmed that partnership arrangements had been established to provide facilities to cater for local sporting needs. The Rushey Mead facility had been problematic in respect of other issues relating to the facilities that did not relate to the provision of football. The existing tenants had been advised to use the facility appropriately, but that there has been no prevention by the City Council in allowing football to be played at the Rushey Mead facility.

As Ward Councillor for Rushey Mead, Cllr Dave also confirmed that he had received assurances from City Council officers that the football activities would not stop and that pre-arranged fixtures have been taking place as scheduled. He added that the building remained open and would not be closing.

3. *Have all e-bike scheme stands been removed? What's going to go on their place?*

The City Mayor confirmed that almost all of the existing stands had been removed and the remainder would be removed in the near future. He explained that there had been difficulties across the country

in implementing successful e-bike schemes. It was hoped that suitable alternative models could be considered but that this should not be expected in the short-term.

4. *In young people's council we've been consulted on the potential removal of one of the events during diwali. I've spoken to my peers and they're worried about losing an important event during a religiously important festive period. What's the plan moving forward? Can we get an update?*

The City Mayor responded by stating how proud he was of the festival programme provided in Leicester, though reminded members that public events required a high level of security and the supply of additional staff to ensure that people were safe. He confirmed that the cost of Diwali switch-on and the Diwali day event amounted to £260k; a significant sum at a time of enormous financial pressure, as well as a sum that was significantly higher to that granted for other similar events. It was therefore suggested to in future provide one single event and that a number of meetings had taken place with Councillors and partners to put suitable plans in place. For the coming year, both the switch-on and Diwali events would be taking place, but the level of City Council funding required to hold both events on an annual basis was not sustainable. He added that there had been some encouragement with regard to future support and sponsorship.

5. *Following what looks like a success in Radio 2 in the park, what's the councils plan to bring more events like this to the city?*

The City Mayor stated that he was keen to receive resident feedback following the recent event to understand impact and to help inform views on holding and similar events in the future. He re-affirmed his earlier comments about the recent event being successful though stressed that such events must also work well for residents. He reminded members that Victoria Park had also previously staged several other key events such as the LCFC Premier League title-winning victory event.

Dina (youth representative) asked:

6. *How do you support those with no recourse to public funds?*

The City Mayor stated that the City Council could not support people directly and that this support was led by a number of voluntary sector organisations. He expressed great sympathy for those affected and was hopeful that a future government would help to address the problem.

Councillor Porter asked questions 7-9:

7. *A series of concrete blocks had been installed along the highway on*

Aylestone Road without public consultation. Please can the scheme be paused to allow for consultation before a decision is taken whether to proceed with any work?

The City Mayor agreed to provide further detail on this matter to Councillor Porter.

8. *Why is there not full transparency for contacts relating to SEN provision?*

The City Mayor responded by stating that to the best of his knowledge, the City Council was fully transparent in respect of such arrangements and that these were published. He asked Councillor Porter and other members to let him know if they had any particular concerns.

9. *Would the City Mayor support an inquiry into what happened to Haymarket Consortium Ltd and whether equipment that the City Council had invested in had gone missing?*

The City Mayor stated that he had addressed this matter previously and re-iterated that the company in question unfortunately went out of business as a result of the covid pandemic.

28. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING APRIL - JUNE 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report which was the first in the revenue monitoring cycle for 2023/24 and provided early indication of the significant financial pressures the Council was facing this year, and the worsening picture for future years' budgets.

The Director of Finance noted that there was currently a £12.7m forecast overspend against the latest approved budget. She referred to £17m of cost pressures that were partially offset by £4.3m of lower than budgeted costs and additional income.

She reported that the £17m of cost pressures consisted of the following:

- £9.9m in Education and Children's Services, of which £9.2m was increased costs of children looked after where placement costs have increased faster than budgeted.
- £4.9m in City Development and Neighbourhoods, of which £3m was additional costs of temporary accommodation for homeless households and £1.2m was the higher costs of waste management after the use of a provision set aside for this purpose.
- £2.2m likely additional costs of the local government pay award over and above the budget provision, based on the current pay offer.

The Director of Finance noted that the £4.3m of lower than budgeted costs and additional income related to additional income of £0.3m in Sports Services, an expected £3m lower cost of energy and underspends of £1.0m in corporate

budgets.

In response to comments and questions from members, the following were stated:

- There was a significant overspend on relation to homelessness services. This had resulted from an increase in the number of families identifying as homelessness and from the deepening cost-of-living crisis. It was also forecast that temporary accommodation costs were likely to increase. Further detail on the amount of time people generally spent in temporary accommodation was to be provided.
- In response to a question around the work being undertaken to ensure that people were safe from domestic abuse and violence (as a result of the cost-of-living crisis) it was agreed that additional information would be provided.
- Relating to queries re the level of overspend in relation to Looked After Children placements, it was confirmed that this was a significant issue for the City Council and although placement costs had risen rapidly, there was a huge variance in individual placement cost depending on individual need.
- It was reported that items in relation to the DFE recovery plan, Childrens placement costs and SEND transport to be on the workplan for the relevant scrutiny.
- In relation to the DFE recovery plan, it was noted that many other local authorities had a level of deficit significantly higher than that of the City Council and officers agreed to provide a list of examples to members separately.
- It was agreed that further detail in relation to why a recent application for a free school was rejected by the Department for Education be provided to commission members.
- Following concerns raised in relation to recruiting agency staff to fulfil roles within Adult Social Care, it was stated that the authority had launched a number of campaigns to try and attract staff but that it was financially advantageous for individuals to be employed via an agency rather than the City Council directly. It was acknowledged that many Councils struggled as a result of this and that there had been continued work to invest in our own staff.
- That confirmation of the number of employees that work within the Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment service be provided.
- Levels of school meal uptake had not recovered to the levels experienced pre-pandemic.
- It was acknowledged that landfill tax costs were relatively high, but that this was in part as a result of greater levels of waste disposals from home given the surge in the number of people regularly working from home.
- Further detail would be provided on the number of HRA properties that were presently vacant.

In response to a question from a youth representative regarding how the authority would respond should it be in a similar financial position to that

experienced by Birmingham City Council, the City Mayor stated that a range of factors led to Birmingham's plight and that the approach Leicester City Council has adopted in managing its finances has allowed the authority to be aware of and be able to respond to the increased financial pressures. He explained that the challenges ahead for the City Council were significant and that some difficult decisions would be required to be taken to ensure that the authority did not suffer similar consequences to Birmingham.

AGREED:

- 1) That the overall position presented within the report be noted
- 2) That as outlined above, further responses be provide in relation to the requests by commission members for additional information.
- 3) That the scrutiny commissions continue to examine the detail of the finances relating to those policy areas of particular significance, as outlined in the report and discussed during the consideration of this item.

29. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING APRIL - JUNE 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report which showed the position of the capital programme at the end of June 2023 (Period 3). She reminded members that the programme provided an oversight in relation to progress on project spending, and once that the budget for a project had been reset, it was marked as green on the monitoring report. She also explained that the City Council was continuing to experience delays in the construction market which were having an impact on the delivery of some projects.

In response to member questions and comments, the following were stated:

- In relation to a query regarding right-to-buy receipts, it was confirmed that overall cost was different when the authority built its own homes and that the same equation for calculating cost cannot be used in calculating costs in all circumstances.
- On a related matter, it was agreed that further detail in relation to the types of property that had been sold via right-to-buy during the last year would be provided to members.
- In response to concerns that there had been delays in spending related to the Jewry Wall project, the Director of Finance confirmed that the £776k figure listed in the report related to the first spending period of 2023/24. Further spending would be reflected in future reports to OSC and it was stated that spending was generally weighted towards the end of such projects.
- Further detail would be provided in relation to the number of houses that had been built to date at Ashton Green and the level of infrastructure works that had been carried out. The City Mayor also offered to set up a site visit for members to show how the scheme had recently been developing.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report and the recommendations outlined be noted
- (2) That further information be provided in relation to right-to-buy properties and progress in relation to Ashton Green; and
- (3) That consideration be given to convening a site-visit to Ashton Green as suggested by the City Mayor.

30. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report that presented the Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23 from the Chair of the Overview Select Committee which detailed the activity performed by the City Council's scrutiny bodies during 2022/23.

In presenting the report, the Chair made the following points:

- Full Council was required to approve a Scrutiny Annual Report each year, and that OSC would consider the report in advance.
- The report was set out on a commission basis, drawing on particular highlights and areas of achievement and referring to scrutiny ambitions for the current year.
- The Chair stated that he was very pleased with the volume and quality of scrutiny that took place last year and was enthused by the work that had already taken place so far this year.
- Scrutiny had a fundamental role to play in the governance of running the city and he intended for it to continue to examine those issues that were of the most significant public interest, and of interest to members.
- Scrutiny would continue to utilise a range of methods to examine, and ultimately to try and improve public services.
- He noted that he was particularly pleased that OSC were beginning to undertake some focussed, in-depth scrutiny in relation to city council workforce representation.
- He thanked all political colleagues who had served as chairs throughout the period, and for all members who were currently and previously involved with scrutiny.
- He also thanked the City Mayor and his team, along with officers from across the City Council and within partner organisations that supported and equipped the scrutiny function.

Members generally endorsed the annual report. Particular thanks were paid to Anita Patel, a long-serving Scrutiny Support Officer who was to shortly retire from service at the City Council.

AGREED:

That the report be endorsed in advance of its submission to Full Council.

31. UPDATE ON INFORMAL SCRUTINY - EQUALITIES / WORKFORCE REPRESENTATION

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance provided a verbal update to reflect progress to date and the proposed next steps with the informal scrutiny work in relation to equalities and workforce representation.

She made the following points to members:

- A detailed discussion took place at the previous meeting which formed the basis of taking forward some in-depth work in relation to this area.
- The Equalities Manager had recently led a session that set out how the City Council adhered to the Public Sector Equality Duty. This served as helpful context for carrying out more detailed scrutiny.
- Two dates were being arranged for later in the calendar year to examine workforce data in detail, with an initial session setting out data in relation to the City Council's workforce and a second session focussing on issues regarding recruitment.
- She welcomed the involvement of scrutiny on this matter and any observations and recommendations that would be made in due course.

Members and the City Mayor both welcomed the direction this work was taking and was pleased that an exercise for both members and officers to examine data sets together was scheduled.

AGREED:

That the progress update be noted

32. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was asked to consider the current work programme and to make comments and/or amendments as it considered necessary.

In response to a suggestion, the Director of Finance confirmed that a report that outlined the environmental impact of construction projects could be brought to a future meeting.

AGREED:

That subject to the above addition, the current work programme be noted.

33. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 7:15pm.